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FEATURE

Putting Simple Back Into SNMP

October 18, 1999

Castle Rock Computing SNMPc Workgroup 5.0
2600 and 3600 platforms.



Mature and fully functional, Castle Rock's simple SNMP network management server offers health reports, canned graphics, support for third-party enterprise MIBS, an enterprise event engine and an expandable architecture, which just don't happen overnight. It's obvious why Cisco Systems resells SNMPc to deliver Cisco Works 2000.

The user interface is strictly Win32 and works well over remote control, but we were disappointed in that it doesn't have a Web interface as Ipswitch does. Navigation is good, offering multiple ways of jumping into more detail. For example, you can select MIB browsing and graphing of usage statistics without first going back to a top-level menu. This is much better than offering tool button jumps within the context of the selected device. Mucho mature!

Despite its maturity, we did have one mishap at the beginning of our testing with SNMPc. We were shocked when SNMPc discovered the Internet by default. Normally network autodiscovery programs stop at the local subnet or (at worst) the network. Our profound apologies to all those who sent e-mail exclaiming "what the bleep are you doing, probing my servers." (Some of you might consider changing your communities to something other than public/private.) It turns out that by default SNMPc runs wide open, finding and probing any and all devices.

After our inadvertent Internet mapping, we reset the database, and filtered our discovery to only our local responsibility. However, for some reason we lost the ability to track and automatically discover additional devices. The embarrassment of being publicly humiliated on the Internet must have been too much for venerable SNMPc.

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Diagnostically speaking, SNMPc features best-of-class tools. Canned MIBs include MIB II and enterprise MIBs from Cabletron Systems, Cisco, Nortel Networks and 3Com Corp. In addition, SNMPc comes with the Hub View application. Hub View provides realistic graphics to depict some infrastructure devices, and more generic icons for those devices not in its database. Unfortunately, older equipment had realistic graphic skins, while newer devices—those more likely to be present on your network—fell into the generic heap. For example our Synoptics (pre-Bay Networks/Nortel Networks) hub came up clear as a bell. But our Cisco 1900 and 2900 switches had to wear the generic skins. Cisco makes available lifelike graphics for these devices, but you'll have to get them yourself.

With or without the real-looking icons, SNMPc offers predefined looks at SNMP MIB variables. In most cases, we found both graphic and tabled-text statistical looks at system, usage and errors, at both LLC (Logical Link Control) and network layers. We were able to point and right-click on our frame relay router, displaying circuits and assigned DLCs (Data Link Controls). We were impressed by this level of detail. It was typical of what we found throughout SNMPc.

Unfortunately, SNMPc lacks the intelligence to turn off functions that don't make sense. For example, when a device is chosen on the map, the unsuspecting will be able to search for a frame relay statistic, even if the device is a Novell server. It's probably fair to think that the program should know the difference between a Novell server and a frame relay router, but knowing that a device doesn't support bridge statistics, and that a zero in that table is nothing to lose sleep over, requires an administrator.

It's important to remember that WhatsUp Gold cannot show bridge statistics. If you are interested in that level of detail, the open granularity of SNMPc is a better bet.

SNMPc Workgroup 5.0, \$995 (base version), \$2,495 (enterprise version), Castle Rock Computing, (408) 366-6540; fax (408) 252-2379. www.castlerock.com

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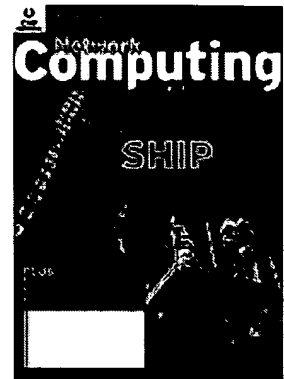
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